

*Washington's
Child
Support
Program*

**An
Overview**



Washington State
Department of Social
& Health Services

DCS Division of Child Support

Child support is important

Children need support from both parents. When a parent does not live with the child, child support is the money paid to provide for the child's basic needs.

- A child's basic needs include food, shelter and clothing. They can also include day care costs and medical coverage.
- Child support is more than a parent's gifts of time, love and emotional support.
- Taking care of children's needs gives them a healthier, more secure life.
- We do not guarantee child support collections or payments.

The Division of Child Support

The Department of Social and Health Services, Division of Child Support (DCS) collects child support for children receiving public assistance and for those who have a parent or parents out of the home.

Parents and caretakers can ask DCS for help collecting child support and enforcing medical coverage.

If a parent does not already have an order for child support, DCS can establish an administrative child support order. DCS can also refer the case for establishment of paternity.

For more information about DCS:

- Call us at 800-457-6202
- Or go to our Web Site at www.childsupportonline.wa.gov

DCS can help you...

- Get a child support order for your children
- Establish paternity
- Collect current and back child support
- Enforce medical support
- Modify your child support order
- Work with other states to collect support on your behalf

DCS cannot help you with...

- Child custody or visitation disputes
- Enforcement of community property settlements
- Collection of attorney's fees
- Other non-child support related debts

Applying for DCS services

Either parent can apply for our services; so can non-parent caretakers. Parents can download the forms at:

www.childsupportonline.wa.gov

- or call -

800-442-KIDS (800-442-5437)

to ask for an application.

Mail the completed application to us:

**DCS
PO Box 11520
Tacoma, WA 98411**

Parents or caretakers receiving public assistance do not need an application because the Community Services Division provides the necessary information to DCS.

Public assistance

It is hard for a parent or caretaker to carry the full responsibility for all the needs of a child. Sometimes a parent must get help from the taxpayers for money to pay for a child's housing, food and medical needs through cash public assistance, also known as Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF).

- While a parent or caretaker receives public assistance for a child in their home or in foster care, the state keeps any collected child support.
- When the family no longer needs TANF, DCS collects child support and sends it to the parent or caretaker.
- The state may keep some child support payments when the family is no longer on TANF.
- We do not guarantee child support collections or payments.

For more information about public assistance, call the Community Services Division at 800-865-7801.

Or go to the Web Site www.washingtonconnection.org to apply, renew, or report a change.

Paternity

Unmarried parents may establish paternity (fatherhood) when the mother and the father voluntarily agree he is the father and they sign an Acknowledgment of Paternity. DCS also offers genetic testing to

determine fatherhood in certain cases. Other cases are referred for action in the superior court. Knowing who the father is allows children to get child support money. It may also help children to get health insurance, veteran's benefits, or social security benefits.

There are three ways to become the legal father of a child:

- Marry the mother before the child's birth.
- Sign and file a legal form called an Acknowledgment of Paternity. The birth certificate will name the father if both parents agree to sign the form.
- Go to court.

For more information:

- Call 1-800-442-5437
- Or go to our paternity establishment website at <http://www.dshs.wa.gov/dcs/services/paternity.asp>

Court orders

In Washington, Superior and Tribal Courts establish orders and decide who should pay the child support. Court orders can be for divorce, custody, paternity and/or other child support related issues. Only the court can make changes to a court order.

DCS cannot change the wording in court orders. State law requires DCS to follow court orders exactly as written. When DCS establishes a child support order, we include a medical support provision requiring both parents to provide medical insurance, when it is available through an employer or union.

Arrears debts

- DCS and the courts set the monthly child support payment using the Washington State Child Support Schedule and according to the parent's ability to pay.
- Unpaid child support payments become a debt called an arrears debt.
- Money owed to custodial parents for back child support or owed to DSHS for TANF assistance given to the child are arrears debts.

Changing a child support order (Modification)

Courts and DCS may raise or lower the child support amount based on state, tribal and federal laws. DCS reviews cases for children who receive public assistance every 35 months. If DCS finds the child support payment needs changing we try to change (modify) the order, whether it is a court or administrative order.

Parents whose children do not receive TANF can also ask DCS for a hearing with an Administrative Law Judge to modify their administrative child support order. Parents whose children do not receive TANF can ask DCS to review their court orders for child support for modification

every three years. County Prosecuting Attorneys review the request. The Prosecuting Attorney may file an action in court if there is reason to raise or lower child support. These actions can take from 4 to 9 months to complete.

If you would like DCS to review your support order, call DCS and ask for a Modification Review. Parents can also modify child support orders on their own, or with help from a family law facilitator or private attorney. Facilitators may be able to help with the *pro se* (for yourself) modification process. This means going to court on your own without the help of an attorney. Sometimes proceeding *pro se* is a faster way to change a child support order.

To find the facilitator in your County Clerk’s Office call 800-933-6772

- Or go to www.courts.wa.gov or www.mrsc.org.

Payments to DCS

Some orders allow the payers to send payments directly to the custodial parent. Other orders allow payers to send payments to DCS by personal check, on the Web or by electronic funds transfer (EFT). For information about EFT and Web payments call 800-468-7422 or see the DCS Website at www.dshs.wa.gov/dcs/pay.asp.

Most support orders provide for income withholding, which means that the employer must take support payments from the noncustodial parent’s net earnings (take-home pay) and send the money to the WSSR. In most instances, DCS may take withholding action even if the noncustodial parent is not behind in payments.

Mail checks or money orders to

WSSR
PO Box 45868
Olympia, WA 98504-5868

Payments to parents and caretakers

Custodial Parents can receive child support payments by Direct Deposit or a Prepaid Debit Card called the DCS Card. These methods allow DCS to deposit payments electronically. If you prefer to have your support payments sent by check, let DCS know. The DCS Card has a VISA logo, and allows DCS to deposit payments so that ATM machines or point of sale locations (that accept VISA cards) can dispense child support money.

Direct Deposit and the DCS Card authorization forms are available on the DCS Web Site at www.dshs.wa.gov/pdf/publications/22-078.pdf. For more information call 1-800-468-7422.

Payment delays

- It takes time for DCS to receive a court order from the Superior Court Clerk and set up a case.
- Sometimes DCS cannot find the noncustodial parent to serve legal papers, attach wages or other assets.
- Sometimes, the non-custodial parent requests a hearing to challenge the child support payment or the arrears debt.
- If the non-custodial parent is receiving public assistance or is unemployed, DCS may not be able to collect support.
- If the custodial parent does not provide a current address, payments may be delayed.
- Holidays can delay mail delivery.

Enforcement

State and federal laws give DCS many tools to collect child support. We call it “enforcement” when we use collection tools. Some tools we use to collect child support include:

- Attachment of wages and other income like unemployment and retirement benefits.
- Suspension of driver’s, fishing, hunting and other licenses.
- Seizure and sale of cars, boats and other vehicles.
- Attachment of investments, savings and checking accounts.
- Attachment of IRS returns, inheritances, and lottery winnings.
- Passport denial.

Other states

State and federal laws allow states to work together when parents live in different states. DCS can ask other states to help establish, modify and collect child support and the other states can ask DCS to help them.

Because all state laws are not the same, it may be hard to collect regular payments when two or more states work on a child support case. When this happens, DCS tries to find and attach wages. Some states charge fees for services, and some states charge interest on unpaid arrears debt balances. Washington State does not charge fees or interest but does collect interest for other states.

Tribal cases

Some Indian tribes have their own child support programs. Other tribes may have their own child support laws and processes for establishing and enforcing child support when a parent is a tribal member, lives on the reservation, or works for the tribe. DCS works with tribes to establish and enforce child support cases.

Call DCS for information about tribal child support or go to our Web Site at www.dshs.wa.gov/dcs/tribal.

Both parents should tell DCS when:

- The child moves out of the custodial parent's home.
- The child moves into the noncustodial parent's home.
- You move and have a new address.
- You change your name.
- There is a new court order changing child support.
- You or the child goes on public assistance, Social Security Disability (SSD), or Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

DCS contacts parents and caretakers to ask if they have information to help collect child support. Tell us if the non-custodial parent:

- Changes jobs, becomes unemployed or injured.
- Uses other names and Social Security numbers.
- Owns cars, houses, or investments or bank accounts.
- Has family and friends who might know information.
- Is in jail, prison or work release.

Family violence

You can get help if you or your children are in danger. Physical abuse is a crime.

- Call the Police.
- Call the Domestic Violence Hotline at 800-562-6025.
- Call the Child Protective Services (CPS) 800-562-5624 or 866-ENDHARM.
- Call the Address Confidentiality Program (ACP) at 800-822-1065.
- Tell your Support Enforcement Officer or your public assistance worker. State law requires us to report if we believe a child is the victim of abuse or neglect.

People with disabilities

DCS provides help for the hearing impaired.

- Call our TDD line at 360-664-5011.

We can also arrange for sign language and interpreters.

- Call us at 800-820-2363.

We know you want to take care of your children. Contact us.

CITY	PHONE NUMBERS	EMAIL
Everett:	800-729-7580 425-438-4800	everett-dcs@dshs.wa.gov
Kennewick:	800-345-9981 509-374-2000	ken-icemail@dshs.wa.gov
Olympia:	800-345-9964 360-664-6900	oly-icemail@dshs.wa.gov
Seattle:	800-526-8658 206-341-7000	seattle-dcs@dshs.wa.gov
Spokane:	800-345-9982 509-363-5000	spomail@dshs.wa.gov
Tacoma:	800-345-9976 253-597-3700	tacoma-dcs@dshs.wa.gov
Vancouver:	800-345-9984 360-696-6100	vancouver-dcs@dshs.wa.gov
Wenatchee:	800-535-1113 509-886-6800	wenatchee-dcs@dshs.wa.gov
Yakima:	800-441-0859 509-249-6000	yak-icemail@dshs.wa.gov
Headquarters:	800-457-6202 360-664-5000	dcs-cru@dshs.wa.gov



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